

# The Truth

by Thich Thanh Tu

translated by Minh Tâm

## Content

- [Introduction](#)
- [Law of Impermanence](#)
- [Law of Cause and Effect](#)
- [Law of Causation](#)

## Introduction

The teaching of Buddha is very simple and understand, in terms of clarity and applicability. The Buddha preached of no mystics: There is *no God to save you*. Only *you can save yourself*.

All of what he said was derived from his direct experiences through observations and meditations. For example, during the meditation about the life of lotus plants in a muddy swamp, he concluded that living things, especially human beings, possess Bodhi-nature (Bodhi=Brilliance). If a lotus plant can emerge from the murky water to reach the dazzling sun and produce its colorful and fragrant flowers, a human being can emerge from his adversity and work hard to reach his potentiality in order to contribute something useful and beautiful to life - regardless if one is a farmer, a worker, or a professional.

Ultimately, the Buddha's Teaching derives from the observable *truths* that in present day scientists call "laws"; namely the *Law of Impermanence*, the *Law of Cause and Effect*, and the *Law of Causation*.

## Law of Impermanence

Buddha had always reminded his audience that *things are impermanent*, including *life*. Everything is forever changing. He insisted that his followers should observe and meditate on those in order to recognize them as a first-hand experience.

Let us try some observations. From the human to the material world, there is nothing that does not change. In the human body, cells split, grow and die incessantly. Through the processes, the cells transform an egg and a sperm into a cute baby; a baby into a youthful teenager; a teenager into a loving, beautiful young woman; a young woman into a delicate wife and an adorable mother; and then, all traits of beauty of an energetic life eventually fade away and are replaced by a frail, unpleasant silhouette waiting for disintegration. How pitiful and ephemeral human life is! Even in the United States where the advancement of medicine and technology can prolong life to over a hundred years, people cannot stay strong and free from illness. All elderly people are dying to pass away from their unproductive years. This *Law of Impermanence*, thus, applies to all beings. No one can escape it. Because it is an eternal truth.

Or take a look at a brand new car. No matter how much care you put into it, after three to five years the car shows signs of wear and tear. Finally, it will be winding into a wreckage.

And look at any relationship. None of them will last forever. As time passes, neighbors move out, friendships disappear, even kinship loosens, not to mention marital loves.

We are suffering because we do not understand the law, nor do we acknowledge it. We wish to stay young forever, avoiding sickness and death. We lament our health when sick, and are terrified when death shows up at our

doorstep.

Or we want to be always rich, to experience a comfortable life or satisfaction, to have a wonderful family with a handsome or beautiful spouse and smart children. We are afraid of adversity and of any changes.

Therefore, some of us come to Buddha, unfortunately, not for the truth in his teachings, but because of wrong thoughts that we can pray Buddha for whatever we want. No wonder people become increasingly greedy and miserable, despite the fact that they go to temple very often.

Should we understand and recognize the *Law of Impermanence*, we could change our perspective toward life. We would *admit life as it is*, no matter what kind of change or adversity we encounter. That *is* the teaching of Buddha. We would be *brave* and *wise* in any circumstance, and more sympathetic to others. Never again would we cry when facing a mishap, an illness, or even death. And that is the *appropriate view*, from which Zen Master Van Hanh in the Lý dynasty put into verse, regarding life and human conditions:

The human body, like lightning, appears and departs,  
As tree grow in Spring and droop in Fall.  
Despite its growth or ruin, we should be not alarmed,  
Considered dewdrops on tips of grass as they are all.

However, there are critics who interpret Buddhist viewpoint to be discouraging, or even fatalistic. If things are always changing and human lives are predetermined to suffer and die, why do we bother to maintain a constructive and decent life? Not only does this interpretation misconstrue the Teaching; it represents a shallow thought.

With an earnest observation, it is true that life is forever changing? But facing a truth, one can react either negatively or positively, depending on his or her point of view. The Buddhist teaching, in reality, broadcasts a positive viewpoint. The aforementioned verse has proved it. Life is as short as a lightning, which appears and departs in a blink, or as trees that grow in the Spring and droop in the Fall. Nothing remain unchanged. Despite many changes, an enlightened would *recognize them as they are*, considering them as dewdrops on tips of grass.

(A dewdrop is so beautiful, especially under the early morning sun. But it won't last long. And certainly nobody is going to cry when a dewdrop liquefies; because that *is* the way *it is*).

Moreover, Prince Siddhartha became Buddha only because of his positive outlooks. After witnessing the pain and bitterness of his destitute, sick, and dying people through his rare outing trips, he took a solemn promise to search for a Way capable of erasing all human suffering. In other words, his *wished to bring happiness to all human in this painful world*.

In order to realize his vows, he bravely renounced his life of luxury and prestige and went into the wilderness for an ascetic life. Later on, after attaining the Way, the Buddha proclaimed that to successfully follow his path, one should arm oneself with some degrees of *intelligence, compassion, and courage*.

## Law of Cause and Effect

In addition to the Law of Impermanence, Buddha preached the *Law of Cause and Effect*. *Where there is a cause, there will be an effect*. The effect may follow the cause immediately or eventually, from previous life to present, and even future life. Of course, a good cause will produce a good effect and a bad cause will give rise to a bad one. In brief, Buddha advised his audience, : "Would you like to know what you were doing in a previous life, see what you have inherited in this life. To predict what you will be receiving in the next life, carefully observe what you are doing now".

Most people, due to lack of knowledge of the *Law of the Cause and Effect*, believe that their misfortunes were contrived by a Creator. With this common belief, people heavily become dependent of a heavenly deity who control their fates. As a result, people like to pray to all sorts of Gods they can think of to protect them, to bestow on them good fortunes over the bad ones. More often, people willingly admit that they have sinned, and readily succumb themselves to the forgiveness of an imaginary but powerful Creator. In that line of thinking, a human being inherits no dignity and freedom; he is nothing but a puppet of his creator.

To Buddha, that belief is not based on the truth. The *truth* is that everyone *is free to control his or her own life*. He is solely responsible for his actions and he is the only one who bears the results. Happiness or misery, success or failure... it all depends on what he had done or has been doing. Good deeds will bring happiness; evil action will breed misery. As an old saying dictated: "He who sows winds, reaps the storm".

Not only does the *Law of Cause and Effect* govern human actions, it also is universal. An orange tree will produce orange fruit; a lemon tree will provide lemon ones. When dark, heavy clouds gather, one can be sure that rain is going to fall. And a boy is too lazy to do this homework, his parents can be certain that he is going to fail his class.

Just observe any event around us. We will realize that nothing is untouched by the law. By the same token we won't see any interference from Gods. That is why Bodhisattva is always doing only good deeds, and staying away from evil actions. After all, the Bodhisattva understands the law. His life, therefore, is free of god-controlled fears. *He is only afraid of himself*, of his *three poisons* (Greed, Hatred, and Delusions) which will inflict evil behaviors on him, he is not afraid of any heavenly deities' curses.

On the contrary, common people make their lives miserable due to their evil actions. They lie, they cheat, they fabricate stories, they speak evil, and they even have plans to hurt others for their own gain. In brief, they act under the stipulations of greed, anger, or attachment. Naturally, when a bad seed is sowed, an evil effect will sooner or later be delivered. It is clear that only the doer is responsible for the result of what he has done, not a God or a Creator. Neither praying, nor blessing can save one from one's own devilish actions.

To prove this viewpoint, one day the Buddha raised questions to a group of famous Brahmins who, claiming that they had power to talk to God, regularly held prayer sessions for rich people in return for gold and money. Their first question was: "If a man pushes a big chunk of heavy rock down into a well and asks you to pray that it floats, can you do that?" - "No!" replied the Brahmin: "The rock is so heavy, and we cannot pray God for it to float. It has to sink, no matter what".

The next question was: "If a man pours a bucket of oil into a well and asks you to pray that the oil can sink to the bottom, can you do that?" - "No!" came the reply: "Oil is so light; no matter what we do, we cannot make it submerge".

The Buddha, then, concluded: "By the same token, if a person is always doing good deeds, his karma will be as light as oil. He does not have to pray for his fate. Conversely, if one only indulges in evil actions, his karma will be as a big chunk of rock and will pull him down to Hell. Any praying to God for him to be saved would be futile".

To emphasize the importance of the *Law of Cause and Effect*, in his first lecture, the Buddha preached the Four Basic Truths:

1. The sufferings.
2. The customs and habits that lead to sufferings.
3. The cessation of sufferings.
4. The Way that procures cessation.

By the following his teaching, one can save him or herself without the salvation of any deities.

To make himself clearly and logically understood, Buddha explained that human sufferings are derived from causes created by customs and habits, which are generally devilish, by nature. From generation to generation, from one life to the next these devilish causes are repeated and carried over. As a result, he who has created these evil causes has to repay the debts afterwards. In other words, the suffering that humans must endure in number (1) is the *effect* produced by number (2). Now, there is a way to end those sufferings. To reach the cessation as effect in number (3), one has to practice the Way as the good cause governed by number (4).

The Way, consisting of the *Eightfold Path* is devised to completely eradicate the three poisons (greed, hatred, and delusion) which, for many lives, seriously infest human behaviors and cause diabolical thoughts and actions. The Eightfold Path includes: *Appropriate Views*, *Appropriate Thoughts*, *Appropriate Language*, *Appropriate Actions*, *Appropriate Livelihood*, *Appropriate Effort*, *Correct Mindfulness* and *Correct Meditation*.

Nowadays, in practicing the *Law of Cause and Effect* to change our lives for the better, we can proudly declare that Buddhism is not mysticism, but very competitive to the advancement of Science. As a matter of fact, the very existence of Science today is based on the *Law of Cause and Effect*; which, in the essence, is nothing new to the teaching of Buddha since over 2500 years ago.

## Law of Causation

Besides the *Laws of Permanence* and *Cause and Effect*, the Buddha also preached the *Law of Causation*. Through his meditation, Buddha observed that a thing *does not exist independently by itself*. Every existence is a combination. Without such as a composition, nothing actually exists. *To be* is to be under the *formation of causes and conditions*.

Let's try some observations as the Buddha did. Scientists now confirm that the human body is a combination of one hundred trillion cells which create the formation of blood, bones, and inner organs such as the brain, heart, lungs, kidneys, stomach, intestines... and of outer organs such as eyes, ears, nose, mouth, skin, etc. Lacking one or more of these components, a body does not function properly or simply cannot exist.

The *Law of Causation* shows that in humans, there is no such thing called the "ego" or "self". The concept of "I" or "You", with the underlying idea that "Mine" is always better than "Yours" is a delusion. Actually, if "my" condition is better than "yours", it is only because the karma of previous life is not the same, rather than because my body is better than yours.

In addition, even if the body is made from a perfect junction of cells and organs, it will not last long if there is no proper provision of fresh air, nutritious food, and potable water.

In other words, the *Law of Causation* also means that: "*Things only exist when there are enough causes which come together under favorable conditions; and things will disintegrate when causes or conditions are scattered*".

Obviously, to be a human, there are numerous causes and conditions that blend together and create an existence. From the day a mature egg met a healthy sperm and grew in a womb, there are countless unfavorable causes and conditions that may abolish the chance of being born a healthy human child.

Statistics shows that in the Third World, the percentage of young children who survive their harsh environment after seven years of age is also very low. Apparently, being born in the Third World is having less favorable causes and conditions than in the industrialized world.

The Buddha explained that the earnest observations on any events in daily life, one can recognize that nothing happens without numerous causes and conditions involved.

Normally, they appear in innumerable forms that result in good or bad occurrences, depending on one's karma. When karma is formed and causes and conditions cast on, it is not in anyone's hand to control the event any more; not even Gods.

Scientists today express the same about the *Law of Causation*. If there is enough Oxygen and Hydrogen in proper proportions and if the condition, if favorable, it will produce Water ( $2H + O = H_2O$ ). Otherwise, no water exists. This same law applies to all aspects of the human world, including family structures, politics, economics, and social activities.

Source : <http://www.dharmaweb.org>